

AMAAD Institute  
Housing Listening Session Series  
Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health  
Underserved Cultural Communities (UsCC) Unit Mental Health Services Act

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## **Introduction**

The AMAAD (Arming Minorities Against Addiction and Disease) Institute was founded as a grassroots nonprofit Recovery Community Organization (RCO) intended to be culturally relevant to Black lesbian gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer (LGBTQ+), non-binary, and gender nonconforming individuals that are disproportionately impacted as the result of systemic inequities. AMAAD was selected to facilitate the community engagement activities described in the Scope of Work Bid Solicitation issued by the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, Office of the Deputy Directors Strategic Communications Underserved Cultural Communities (UsCC) Unit. In accordance with the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), UsCC created the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit (LGBTQIA2-S) subcommittee with the goal of reducing disparities and increasing mental health access for the LGBTQIA2-S community in the County of Los Angeles. UsCC's selection of the AMAAD Institute to facilitate the Housing Listening Session Series was directly aligned with the UsCC LGBTQIA2-S subcommittee which is intended to work closely with community partners and consumers to increase the capacity of the public mental health system to develop culturally relevant recovery-oriented services, specific to the LGBTQIA2-S community.

The AMAAD Institute has facilitated a multiple UsCC projects including the Black LGBTQ+ Action Coalition (BLAC), the Black Family Unity Project (BFUP), Black Men Rising formerly known as the Panthera Project. Across AMAAD initiatives, the organization set out with a purposeful effort to identify the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly Black and Latinx, while educating and empowering the community about the importance of mental health care and other support needs to build awareness and connection.

The purpose of the LGBTQIA2-S Housing Listening Sessions is to reduce mental health access barriers for LGBTQIA2-S community members, particularly those who are the most underserved based on data including the transgender community, two-spirit community, and commercial sex workers. By hosting listening sessions focused on safe and accessible housing for these communities, an opportunity is created to identify gaps in access, develop solutions with those most impacted, and offer referrals to appropriate resources for mental health, advocacy, and more.

## **Background**

The AMAAD Institute's philosophy, mission, and background uniquely positions and qualifies the organization to facilitate community engagement activities of the Housing Listening Sessions. AMAAD began as a Recovery Community Organization (RCO) offering resources and referrals, including specialized strength-based recovery management and navigation support services in a manner that is culturally relevant to Black LGBTQ+ communities across Los Angeles. With an emphasis on LGBTQ+ individuals, youth and young adults, and other underserved communities, AMAAD's official mission is "to facilitate personalized individual access to programs and services that foster safe and supportive healthy environments for people

to live, learn, and develop to their fullest potential,” which is strongly aligned in partnership with the UsCC LGBTQI2-S subcommittee.

AMAAD’s mainstay activities are centered around peer-based engagement and support services. AMAAD has had uninterrupted experience mobilizing and coordinating local residents, stakeholders and cohort groups prioritizing young adults (18-29 years old), Black/African American, transgender persons, and gay and bisexual men, and persons who use substances since the organization was founded. AMAAD also has a specific priority among people experiencing homelessness, people experiencing mental health support needs, and people experiencing poverty.

Launching its housing division in 2018, AMAAD has operated five independently controlled sites strategically located in the surrounding LAC community: 1) AMAAD Headquarters-Watts Office is located in the Watts Civic Center, which is considered ground zero of the 1965 Watts Rebellion, 2) AMAAD House of Resiliency, a transitional residential living facility supporting the housing needs of LGBTQ+ young adults, 3) the AMAAD Gibson House, a supportive housing facility based in the Historic South Central area, 4) AMAAD House of Dignity, a housing development designed specifically for and operated by Black transgender women, and 5) AMAAD House of Abundance, a housing property prioritizing housing from recently released and others experiencing housing insecurity.

Over the span of its ten years of service, the AMAAD Institute has become firmly positioned as a specialized premier organization and has advocated for community-based health and wellness services that also address intersectional social determinants of health.

## **Program Overview**

AMAAD launched the Housing Listening Session series. The series was led by Chanel Lumiere. Chanel served as Resident Advisor of the House of Dignity, with AMAAD. Chanel has a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Child and Adolescent Development and has worked in the Early Education field serving children and families for over 20 years in such sectors as head start, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), and non-profit private schools. Chanel currently serves as an educator, consultant, mentor, teacher, healer and organizer. She has served several organizations advocating for LGBTQIA2S communities. Formerly serving as a board member and community engagement director for 15 years, Chanel is committed to creating spaces to uplift, celebrate and elevate the experiences of Black and Brown transgender and non-binary individuals and communities through safe, elevated spaces. In December of 2024, Lumiere was promoted to Housing Project Manager with AMAAD, the first TGI individual to serve in program management at AMAAD.

The series was originally aligned with AMAAD’s In Search of Me (ISOM) series. In Search of Me is AMAAD’s monthly skills building series designed for housing occupants and community more broadly.

## **Methods**

The purpose of the LGBTQIA2-S Housing Listening Sessions is to reduce mental health access barriers for community members. By hosting listening sessions focused on safe and accessible housing for our communities, an opportunity is created to identify gaps in access, develop solutions with those most impacted, and offer referrals to appropriate resources for mental health, advocacy, and more.

- 6 sessions for the 2024 calendar year. These sessions were incentives for up to \$75.00 refreshments were provided.
- A total of 86 community members were present. Not including staff, visitors or funders. Total of 91 including May ISOM session
- April and March we had the highest numbers of attendees
- Participants took a survey after the listening sessions.
- Findings from the survey included thoughts of previous knowledge on the topics. Demographics such as gender identity age, race, and current housing status were also collected.
- Participants provided us with valuable feedback including their own resources.

## **About In Search of Me**

“In Search of Me” is a life skills and personal development series that equips participants with skills and abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enables them to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life.

The model instills a sense of social consciousness which leads to behavioral change. As a commonsense theory, it reinforces participants’ innate ability to understand and assess the things they see and hear on a regular basis. This theory also highlights the importance of values, personality, character, and consequences of choices.

One participant shared, “[For many of us, a] culture of poverty has trapped folks into thinking we have to stay poor.”

The intent of the In Search of Me Series is to provide the necessary tools that will transform lives. “It is a proactive approach to taking control of life,” another participant shared.

Some responses when asked:

### **How did the experience of homelessness make you feel?**

Stressful, Overwhelming, Triggering, Scary, Confusing, Doubt, Worrying, Hopelessness, Assertive, Resourceful, Advocacy... I felt these feelings when I experienced being unhoused and this is how it impacted my mental health

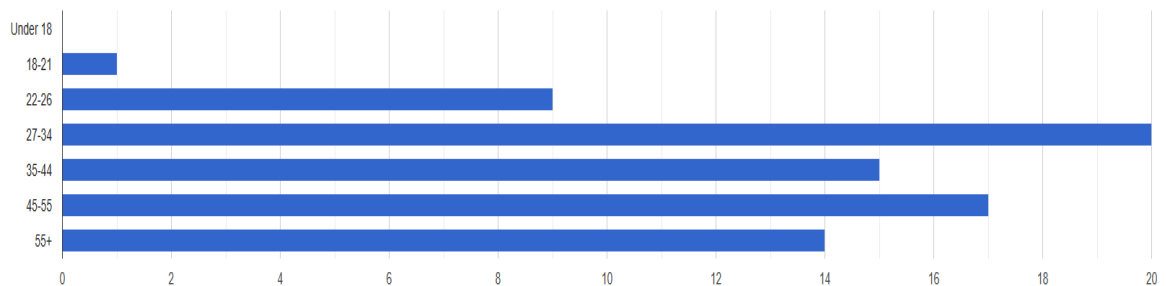
## How does experiencing community make you feel?

Sense of belonging, teamwork, positivity, collaboration, support, familiarity, trust, acceptance, strength, safety, encouragement, love, Hope, motivation...Community gives you a chance...

### Data:

#### Age:

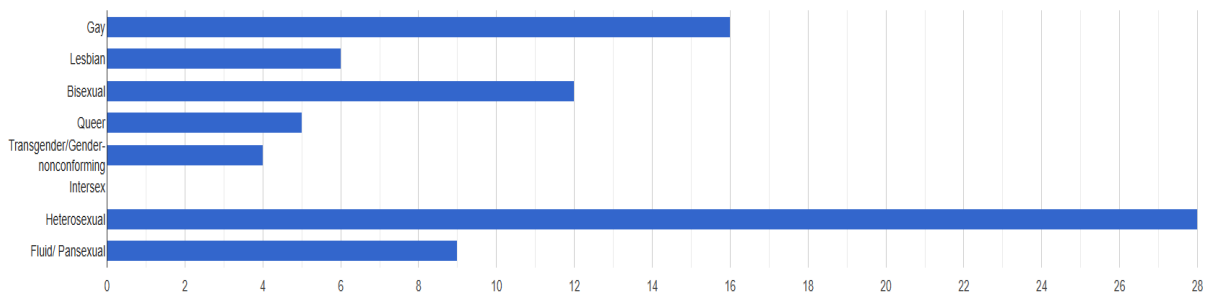
Age



76 responses in 75 results

## Sexual Orientation

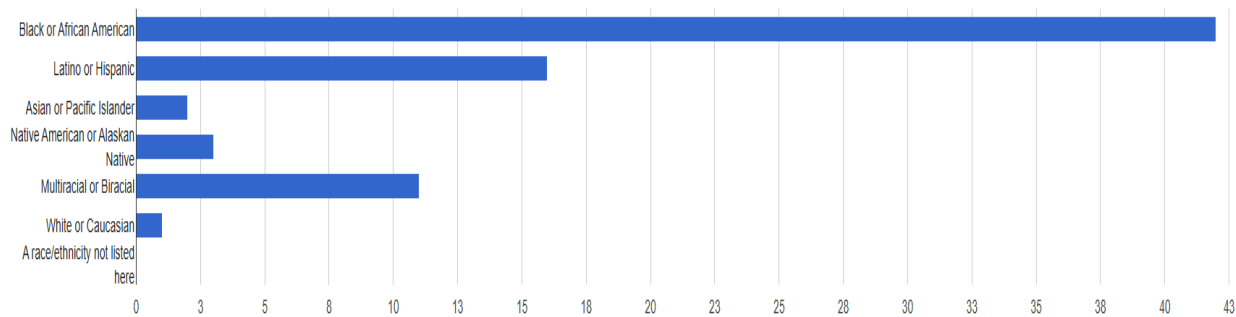
Sexual orientation (select all that apply)



80 responses in 75 results

# Race/ Ethnicity

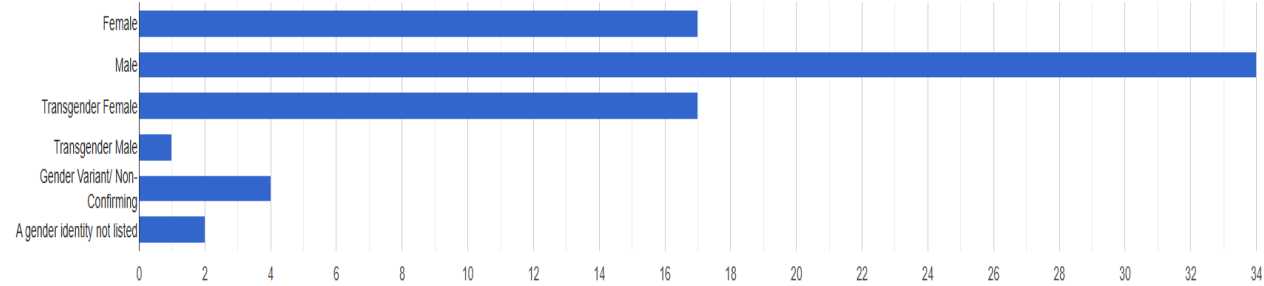
Race/ Ethnicity that best describes you: (Please select one answer.)



75 responses in 75 results

# Gender Identity

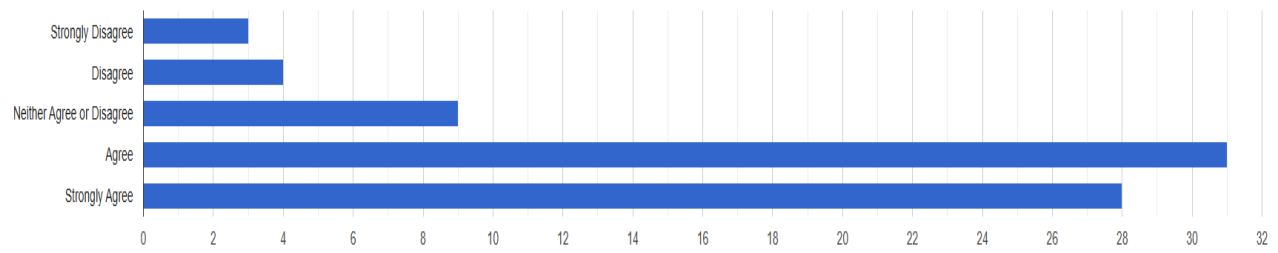
To which gender identity do you most identify?



75 responses in 75 results

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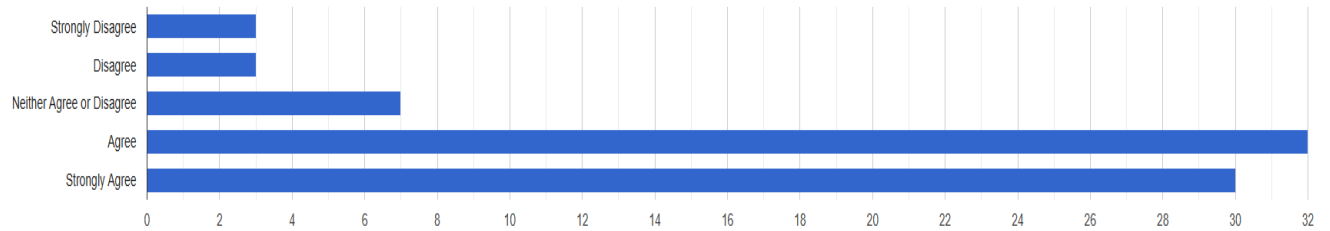
**I am informed about housing resources in Los Angeles County.**



75 responses in 75 results

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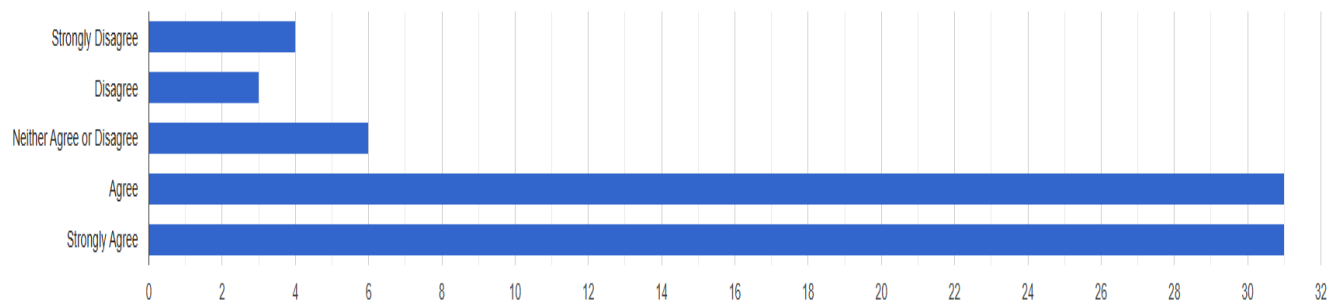
**I am informed about mental health resources in Los Angeles County.**



75 responses in 75 results

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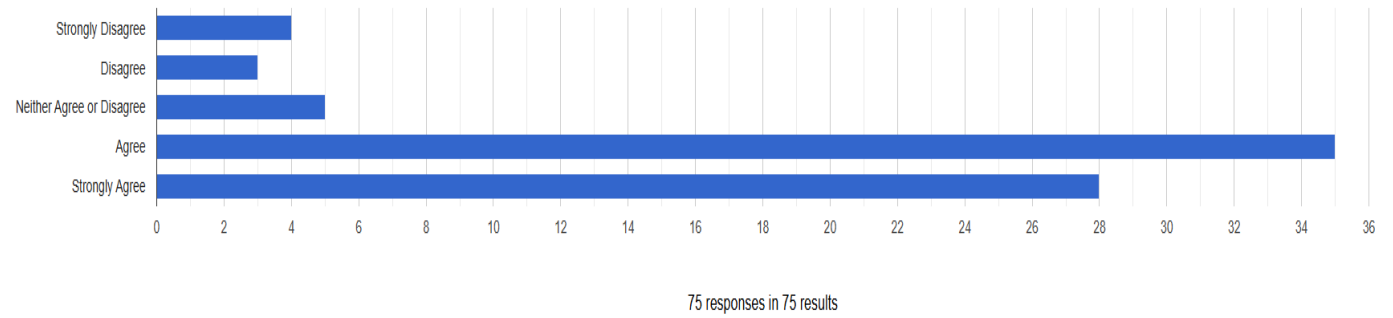
**I am informed about how to access mental health resources in Los Angeles.**



75 responses in 75 results

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**I am equipped to address individual mental health concerns.**

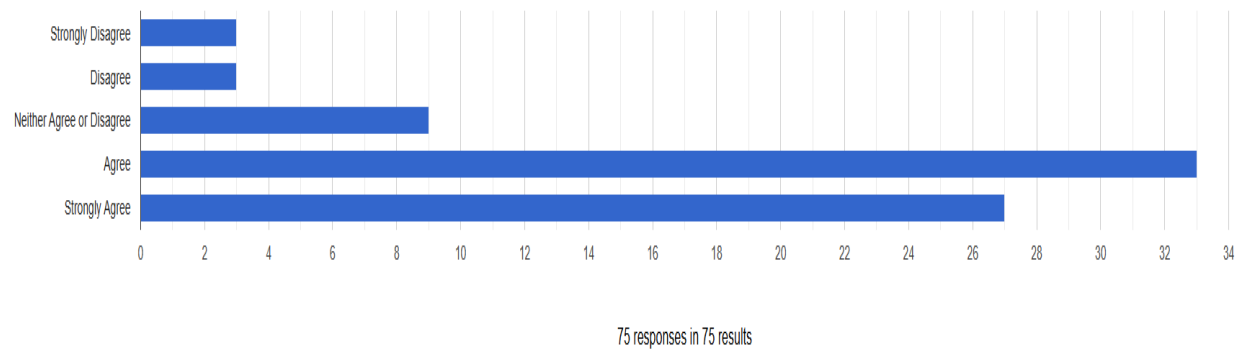


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**I feel equipped to address community mental health concerns.**

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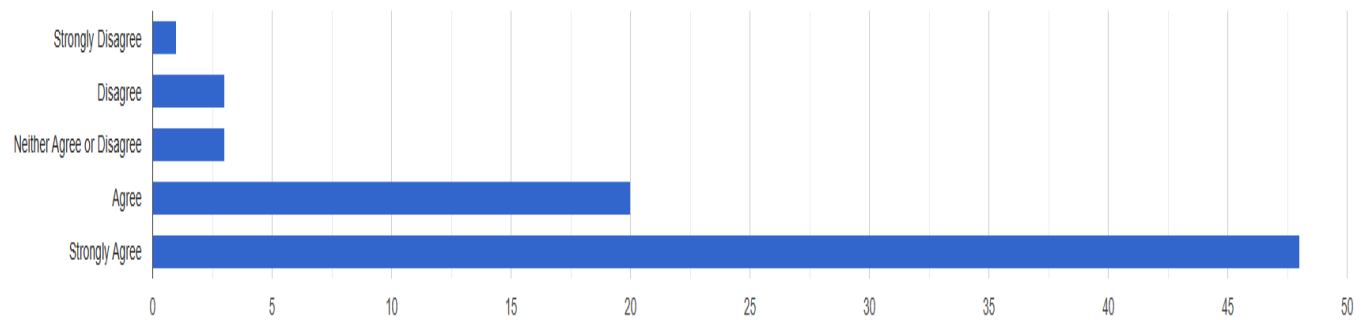
**I feel empowered to individual mental health concerns.**





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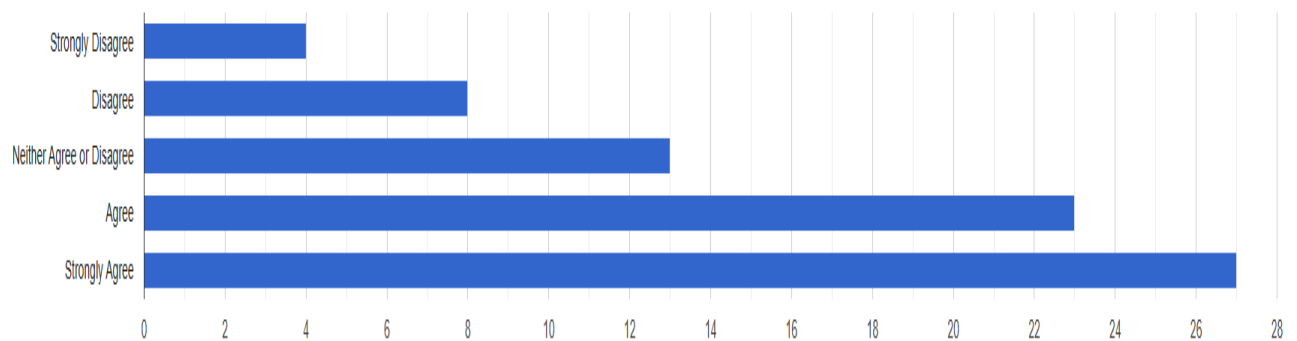
Connections like these groups are important to me.



75 responses in 75 results

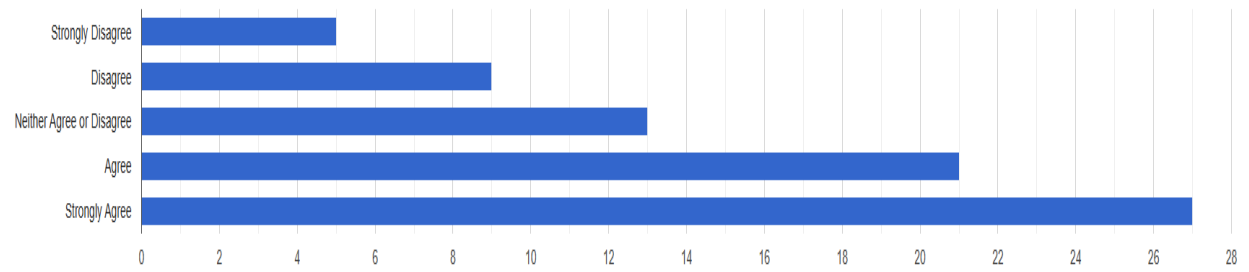
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I have experienced stigma or discrimination because of my racial identity.



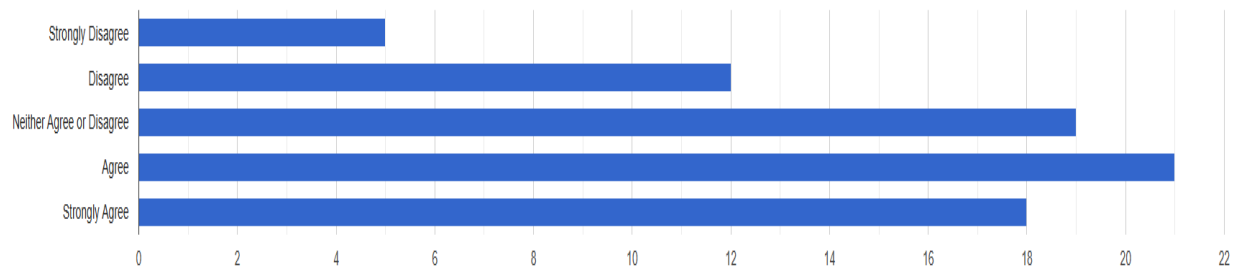
75 responses in 75 results

I have experienced stigma or discrimination because of my sexual identity.



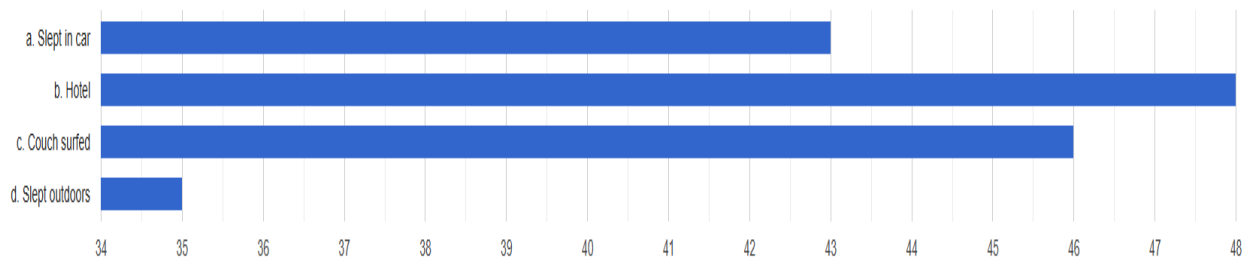
75 responses in 75 results

I have experienced stigma or discrimination because of my housing status.



75 responses in 75 results

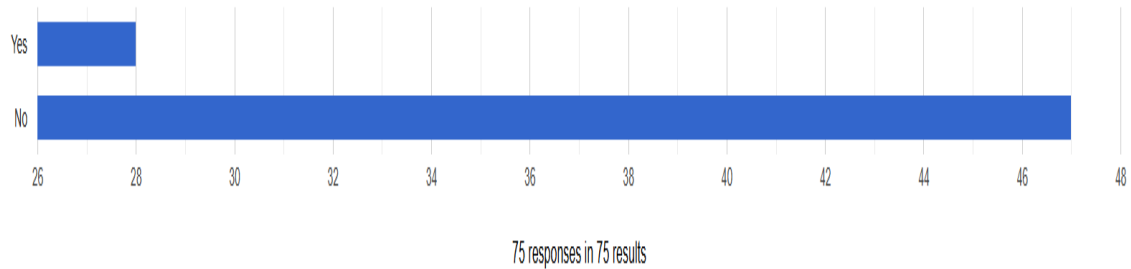
Have you ever experienced the following: (select all that apply)



172 responses in 75 results

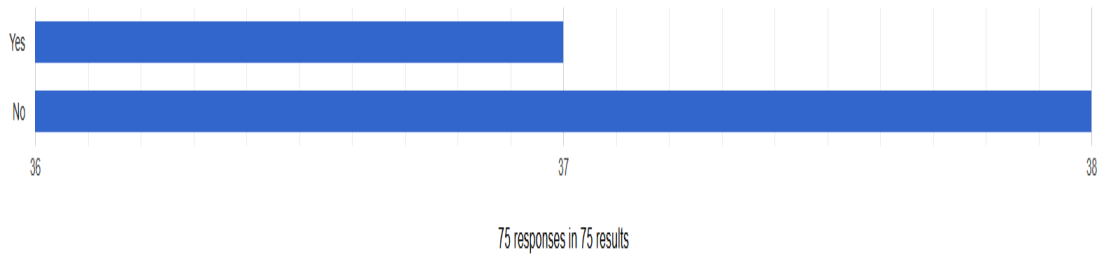
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Have you ever had sex with someone for someplace to stay?



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Have you ever had sex with someone for exchange for any other essential needs?



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## AMAAD Institute Housing Listening Session Townhall

### Purpose

The AMAAD Institute's Housing Listening Session Townhall was designed to prioritize the voices and experiences of Black and LGBTQ+ communities facing homelessness. The townhall sessions set to lay a strong foundation for dialogue and action, ensuring that the voices of those most affected are at the forefront of our efforts.

The primary goals were to:

- **Gather Insights:** Understand the unique challenges and needs of these communities.
- **Foster Dialogue:** Create a safe space for open and honest conversations.
- **Inform Policy and Programs:** Use the feedback to shape more effective and inclusive housing policies and programs.

### Methods:

The townhall was open to community, conversation, and panel hosted by Chanel Lumiere and Bobby Dillard of AMAAD Institute. The Townhall was held as a part of AMAAD's Summit of Our Tribes, an annual community conference, held at Charles Drew University.

## **Outcomes**

The townhall sessions yielded several significant outcomes:

1. **Enhanced Understanding:** Participants shared their lived experiences, providing valuable insights into the barriers they face in accessing safe and stable housing.
2. **Community Engagement:** The sessions fostered a sense of community and solidarity among participants, helping to build stronger support networks.
3. **Actionable Recommendations:** Key recommendations were identified, including the need for culturally competent services, increased mental health support, and more inclusive housing policies.
4. **Policy Advocacy:** The feedback gathered will be used to advocate for policy changes at local and state levels to better address the needs of Black and LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness.
5. **Feedback Themes:**
  - **Safety and Inclusivity:** A significant number of participants emphasized the need for safe and inclusive housing environments.
  - **Mental Health Services:** Access to mental health support was highlighted as a critical need.
  - **Systemic Barriers:** Participants discussed systemic barriers such as discrimination and lack of affordable housing.

## **Recommendations & Considerations**

Here are some recommendations for housing providers to better serve Black and LGBTQ+ communities experiencing or at risk of homelessness:

### **1. Culturally Competent and Inclusive Services**

- **Training Staff:** Provide ongoing training for staff on cultural competency, anti-racism, and LGBTQ+ inclusivity to ensure they understand and respect the unique experiences and needs of these communities.
- **Representation:** Hire staff and leadership from diverse backgrounds, including Black and LGBTQ+ individuals, to ensure representation and relatability.

## 2. Safe and Affirming Environments

- **Safe Spaces:** Create safe and affirming spaces where individuals feel respected and valued.
- **Aesthetics:** While individuals may be in transitional or interim housing, having elements of decor and art positively impact morale, mental health, and self-esteem.
- **Zero Tolerance Policies:** Implement and enforce zero-tolerance policies for discrimination, harassment, and violence within housing facilities.

## 3. Comprehensive Support Services

- **Mental Health Support:** Offer accessible mental health services, including trauma-informed care, to address the psychological impacts of homelessness and discrimination.
- **Healthcare Access:** Provide or facilitate access to healthcare services, including HIV/AIDS care, hormone therapy, and other medical needs specific to LGBTQ+ individuals.

## 4. Community Engagement and Outreach

- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with local organizations, like AMAAD, that specialize in serving Black and LGBTQ+ communities to enhance service delivery and outreach efforts.
- **Peer Support Programs:** Develop peer support programs where individuals with lived experiences can offer guidance and support to others in similar situations.

## 5. Housing First Approach

- **Immediate Housing:** Adopt a Housing First approach, which prioritizes providing stable housing without preconditions, followed by supportive services to address other needs.
- **Flexible Housing Options:** Offer a range of housing options, including emergency shelters, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing, to meet diverse needs.

## Conclusion

Implementing these recommendations can help create a more supportive and effective system for addressing homelessness among Black and LGBTQ+ communities. Over the past year, the AMAAD Institute has embarked on a transformative journey through our housing listening session series. These sessions have provided invaluable insights into the unique challenges and

needs of Black and LGBTQ+ communities experiencing homelessness. By actively engaging with community members, stakeholders, and service providers, we have deepened our understanding and strengthened our commitment to creating inclusive, supportive, and effective housing solutions.

**Key Takeaways:**

1. **Community Voices Matter:** The listening sessions underscored the importance of centering the voices of those directly impacted by homelessness. Their lived experiences and perspectives are crucial in shaping responsive and effective programs.
2. **Cultural Competency is Essential:** We have learned that culturally competent and inclusive services are vital in addressing the specific needs of Black and LGBTQ+ individuals. This includes ongoing staff training, representation, and creating safe spaces.
3. **Holistic Support Services:** Addressing homelessness requires a comprehensive approach that includes mental health support, healthcare access, and peer support programs. These services are essential in fostering stability and well-being.
4. **Collaborative Efforts:** Partnerships with local organizations and community stakeholders enhance our ability to provide holistic and effective support. Collaboration is key to creating a robust network of services.
5. **Advocacy and Policy Change:** Systemic change is necessary to address the root causes of homelessness. Advocacy for policy changes and increased funding for supportive services is critical in creating long-term solutions.

As we move forward, the AMAAD Institute remains dedicated to implementing the insights gained from these sessions. We will continue to advocate for and develop programs that are responsive to the needs of Black and LGBTQ+ communities, ensuring that everyone has access to safe, stable, and supportive housing.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all participants, partners, and supporters who have contributed to this important initiative. Together, we are making strides towards a more equitable and compassionate society.